



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 28 June 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
28 JUNE 1968

1. Soviet Union

At Annex today we present our analysis of Gromyko's offer to discuss limitations on strategic weapons.

2. South Vietnam

Belief that some accommodation with the Liberation Front will have to be accepted by the government eventually is being voiced in Saigon. Over the past few weeks, student, labor, and religious groups have called for an end to the fighting and suggested negotiations with the Front.

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The Communists are trying to encourage and exploit these feelings. One of the Front's leading political cadre is reported to have said the Front was highly interested in promoting a peace campaign in Saigon.

3. Malaysia-
Philippines

Delegations of the two countries have been talking in Bangkok about Philippine claims to part of Malaysian Borneo. Both sides feel there has been no progress and are about ready to pack up.

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4. Czechoslovakia

Prague is announcing that the Warsaw Pact exercise will end this weekend and foreign troops will go home. Public statements about the nature of this exercise have changed often enough, however, to give the Czechs some reason to feel a bit uneasy about when their Soviet guests might leave.

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5. France

The Gaullists go down to the wire expecting to get more than the 92 additional seats they need to win in the second round for a majority. They are still worried about voter complacency, however, and are working hard to get their backers to the polls on Sunday.

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ANNEX

Soviet Offer to Discuss Strategic Weapons

Gromyko's offer to "exchange opinions" on the limitation of offensive and defensive strategic weapons comes after more than a year of hesitation in Moscow.

The issue has obviously been a controversial one within Soviet policymaking circles. Broad considerations of military posture, economic allocations, and foreign policy contributed to the long delay in moving toward a decision to talk.

Gromyko's statement does not by itself signify that any of these problems has been definitively resolved. The offer to discuss the question may be only another step--though a large one--by the Soviet leadership in the process of weighing all the factors before coming to a final decision on the future of Soviet weapons systems both offensive and defensive.

The movement in the Soviet position may have flowed from President Johnson's speech to the nation on 31 March. The prospect that an end of the Vietnam war might free the US to devote huge sums to more and better missile systems--which the USSR would be hard-pressed to match--could have played a large part in tilting the scales toward missile talks.

The negotiation of a strategic arms limitation agreement would have a distinct advantage for the Soviets at this time. Their current strategic attack programs will provide them with the most powerful deterrent they have ever had. In the early 1970s, however, the currently programmed US strategic missile systems will begin to erode this capability. Besides, there is the question of costs. Soviet defense expenditures are expected to increase some 10-15 percent by 1970-72. Soviet-American talks could make it possible for Moscow to hold expenditures to about the present levels, allowing much needed allocations to other areas of the economy.

Nevertheless, Gromyko intimated that there were lingering misgivings about the Soviet move within the USSR when he denounced those who regard the arms race as a "fatal inevitability." He charged that those, presumably dogmatic Communists or military leaders, who assert that disarmament is an illusion were "taking a stand close to the forces of the most dyed-in-the-wool imperialist reaction."

On the other questions affecting the climate of US-Soviet relations--the Vietnam war, the Paris peace talks, Middle East tensions, Berlin and Germany--Gromyko stood pat. The Soviet foreign minister noted that Soviet-American relations were "still burdened" by the war and US "aggressiveness." Throughout the speech he steered clear of any suggestion that the door to improved relations was about to be opened. His statements on disarmament were in fact put in the context of multilateral undertakings without mentioning the US by name.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

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Antiwar Phone Campaign: The "Women's Strike for Peace" organization is urging all members and sympathizers to telephone the White House and the Pentagon with antiwar messages on 1 July. The objective is to tie up the telephone lines.

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Claims of Aircraft Shootdowns: Hanoi's domestic service in Vietnamese yesterday broadcast the highly inflated claim that the 3000th US aircraft had been shot down on 25 June. Following this announcement, a 20-minute communique of the armed forces' high command acclaiming this feat was broadcast. The communique asserted that the US had suffered one defeat after another in its air war against the North and that "since late March it has had to carry out so-called limited bombing of North Vietnam." It added that this limitation "is an admission of defeat by the Americans."

The occasion also brought a message of congratulations from Ho Chi Minh.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

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Hanoi on Humphrey: Hanoi has rejected Vice President Humphrey's proposal for a cease-fire. In a domestic commentary of 26 June, Radio Hanoi said that "an immediate cease-fire is not a measure that leads toward peace" and promised that the Vietnamese people would continue to fight as long there were "US aggressors" in Vietnam.

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